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1                   ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

2                  An inflatable curtain having an inflatable portion and a non-inflatable portion is  
3 disclosed. First and second stiffening elements are positioned along the upper edge of the  
4 inflatable curtain. The inflatable curtain is adapted to be stored within an interior portion  
5 of a vehicle prior to inflation. The vehicle has a roof at its highest point, and a housing  
6 within the vehicle and close to the roof defines an internal recess that accommodates the  
7 inflatable curtain. A side impact of a magnitude greater than a predetermined threshold  
8 value is sensed by a sensor mechanism within the vehicle, which then provides an  
9 electrical signal to an inflator which is in fluid communication with the inflatable portion  
10 of the inflatable curtain. The electrical signal causes the inflator to be actuated in a  
11 known manner. The inflator discharges fluid under pressure into the inflatable portion of  
12 the inflatable curtain. Shortly after the inflator discharges, the housing opens and the  
13 inflatable curtain inflates away from the roof. The first and second stiffening elements  
14 provide column support to the inflatable curtain during inflation and reduce the amount  
15 of time it takes for the inflatable curtain to become fully inflated.

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